MISCELLANEA ZOOLOGICA HUNGARICA
Tomus 12. 1998 p. 93–97

Distribution data on wildfowl (Aves: Anatidae) in the Khangai Mountain in Mongolia

by
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(Received July 20, 1998)

Abstract: Records of 15 species are given from the Khangai Mountain region. There are fenological and ecological data on the breeding habits of the rare and the near- threatened Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), data on the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), from a southernmost breeding area, as well as on the Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha*), which is a rather rare species in Mongolia reaching its northwesternmost boundary of the distribution in the Khangai Mountain.
Key words: Anatidae, Mongolia, mountain wetlands

Introduction

The Mongolian avifauna due to the investigations carried out in the last decades became well-known (e. g. Vaurie 1964, Piechocki 1968, Piechocki & Bolod 1972, Mauersberger 1979). Although the data about the regional distribution of certain species is still scanty. The International Waterfowl Research Bureau established the co-operation with Mongolia over wildfowl research and conservation in 1968 (Nowak 1970). From that time some larger wetlands were studied, but many of the scattered small wetlands remained unknown.

In the 1980s when the IWRB compiled the Asian Wetland Inventory it was noted that the data about waterfowl habitats are very incomplete in Mongolia. For this purpose the results of an earlier expedition could be useful. Therefore, I want to contribute my observations on wildfowl from the central part of the Khangai Mountain region, in the northern area of Bajan Hongor ajmak.

I visited this region in 1978 with a small, four-member Hungarian zoological expedition sponsored by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. We spent 15 days in the Khangai Mountains studying three localities: Mandal, Bajan Obo and Bajan Hongor.

Material and method

During the expedition I was dealing with all the bird species living in the study areas. I paid a special attention to the members of the Anseriformes order. At the first locality (Mandal) I made a wildfowl census along a 10 km long stretch of the Cagan Turut Gol (a mountain stream). In the Bajan Obo basin there are two lakes near a yurta village, which were easy to check for birds. I was able to obtain approximate total numbers of the different wildfowl populations occurring in this area in the breeding season.(Table 1)

Table 1. Number of individuals of wildfowl species at the three sites studied in the Khangai Mountain

Species		Mandal	Bajan Obo	Bajan Hongor
Whooper Swan	*Cygnus cygnus*	–	2	
Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*	20	40	
Common Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*	1	4	
Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	12	31	2
Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	–	1	
Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	6	90	3
Garganey	*Anas querquedula*	–	2	
Common Teal	*Anas crecca*	–	9	
Eurasian Wigeon	*Anas penelope*	–	12	
Gadwall	*Anas strepera*	–	26	
Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	–	10	
Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	–	20	
Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	–	51	
Common Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*	–	9	
Goosander	*Mergus merganser*	14	1	

The study area

The main habitat types were high mountain rivers, mountain tundra in about 2500-2700 m above sea level at Mandal, further more perpetually frozen mountain meadows, mountain lakes in about 2000 m about sea level at Bajan Obo. All the above mentioned mountain wetland types were surrounded by dry mountain steppes without any forest nearby. Higher in the mountain there were some smaller forest patches of Larch (*Larix* sp.) usually in the northern slopes.

Results

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus* Linnaeus, 1758)

Two specimens, probably one breeding pair, was recorded on the mountain-tundra lake at Bajan Obo on 15 June and 17 June.

Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus* Latham, 1790)

It is considered as a near-threatened species as a whole in world-wide (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The Khangai Mountain lies within the north-eastern most boundary of this species distribution patches covered. It was a common bird in the study area observed every day at Mandal from 6 to 15 June with a maximum number of 20 adult birds on a 10 km stretch of the Cagan Turut Gol mountain streams valley. One breeding pair with 4 one-week-old downy goslings was found at Mandal on 6 June. The rest of the birds were non-breeding adults often sitting on the rocky peaks along the mountain stream

(Table 2). They had special grazing pastures: small areas with short, green grass surrounded by stony fields along that river bank.

There were 5 breeding pairs together in the lake at Bajan Obo, each pair with 2 or 3 downy young on 16 June.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna* Linnaeus, 1758)

A few specimen was regularly seen in the lower part of the study area at Bajan Obo, but only one record at Mandal: 1 specimen flew along the river on 9 June. Other observations: 2 specimens at Bajan Obo on 15 June, 4 at the same place 16 June.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea* Pallas, 1764)

A rather common bird of the study area recorded every day at all the three localities (Tables 1 and 2). This species is well-protected by the local people due to religious tradition. It is treated as a sacred species because of its coloration in Mongolia, therefore in contrast with other waterfowl it is seldom hunted in this country.

They were feeding in the rapid mountain river using two methods for searching food. Swimming or slowly walking in the shallow water they put their head under water foraging from or among the bottom stones. Other times they were often feeding upside down like a Mallard from the bottom. There were 6 pairs scattered along the river on a stretch of 6 km, but there were 2 pairs on 400 meter stretch along the river.

Two specimens with laud call were chasing a Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) at Bajan Obo. This phenomenon indicates that the Black Stork must be a predator in this bird community for the Ruddy Shelduck offsprings at least in their pullus-ages.

Table 2. The daily number of the two most common waterfowl species in the Khangai Mountains

Localities	Date	*Anser indicus*	*Tadorna ferruginea*
Bajan Obo	5 June	6	4
Galut	5 June	–	2
Mandal	6 June	2 +4 pullus	2
Mandal	7 June	3	4
Mandal	8 June	8	7
Mandal	9 June	14	12
Mandal	10 June	8	4
Mandal	11 June	13	10
Mandal	12 June	3	6
Mandal	13 June	18	3
Mandal	14 June	18	4
Mandal	15 June	20	4
Galut	15 June	–	2
Bajan Obo	15 June	6	2
Bajan Obo	16 June	26 + 14 pullus	31

Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha* Swinhoe,1866)

The Khangai Mountain is situated at the margins of its distribution range, thus also the sporadic observations in the area could be useful. Only one record: 1 specimen on mountain tundra lake at Bajan Obo, on 16 June.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus,1758)

It was a regular inhabitant of the study area, but not as common as it is in its European ranges. Some observations at Mandal: 1 pair on the river on 9 June; 1 male at the same site on 13 June; 1 pair and 1 drake on the river on 15 June.

It was more numerous in lower altitude (2000 m) at Bajan Obo: one flock of 10 birds and 1 pair on 15 June, and two display-flying groups with 2 males+1 female, and 3 males +1 female at the same site at 16 June. There were also larger flocks of 14, than 80 and 90 birds at Bajan Obo at 16 June. The groups consisted of mostly males. It was the incubation period for most of the females.

There were also two records at Bajan Hongor: one female and one pair along the river Tujn Gol on 18 June.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula* Linnaeus, 1758)

Only one observation: 1 pair on the lake at Bajan Obo on 16 June.

Common Teal (*Anas crecca* Linnaeus, 1758)

There were small groups of 3+4+2 birds around the mountain-tundra lake at Bajan Obo. There were 5+3 specimens on the meadow with frozen soil under it on 17 June.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope* Linnaeus, 1758)

It is a passage migrant species of the study area. There were two groups recorded: one flock of 5 birds, and the other one with 8 males at Bajan Obo on 16 June.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera* Linnaeus, 1758)

Piechocki (1968) treated it as a common breeding species in northern Mongolia. It was found in the same status in the Khangai Mountain by our expedition in 1978. I would like to note that at the same time in the 1970s its breeding population dramatically decreased and its breeding area shrunk to 3 nesting sites in Hungary.

It has not occurred along the mountain river at Mandal, but it was fairly common on the mountain lakes at Bajan Obo. By the time of our visit in the area they appeared still in pairs, although two males together without females indicated, that the incubation period had already started. Records: 2 separated pairs on the lake was observed on 15 June. Two pairs together with one male nearby on the smaller lake on 16 June and 2 males together along the floating island covered with sedge, which seemed to function as an ideal nesting place for this species in this environment.

There were more birds on the far side of the larger lake: 1 pair + 1 pair with 1 male nearby and 12 specimens in a loose flock occurred on 16 June. Another pair was flushed from the clumpy meadow with perpetually frozen soil.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata* Linnaeus, 1758)

It was observed only at Bajan Obo on 16 June. There was a small flock of 8 birds resting on a small bare island, and another 2 drakes further on the larger lake.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina* Linnaeus, 1758)

It was recorded only at Bajan Obo, although it was fairly common there. It might breed on this area, but the breeding season has just been started during our visit. There was a small flock of 4 birds (3 drakes and 1 duck) with 2 drakes nearby on the bigger lake on 15 June. There were some 20 birds scattered in smaller groups in the southwestern part of the bigger lake on 16 June. Two females among them were near the floating island covered with sedge, which could be their nesting site.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula* Linnaeus 1758)

It was the most abundant species among the diving ducks at Bajan Obo exceeding the number of the Pochard. At the time of the observation – 15-17 June – they appeared in flocks on the lake at Bajan Obo. In one of the groups there were 18 males and 7 females on 15 June. There were 2 flocks of 16 and 28 individuals on the following day. They were probably still migrants, but beside them there were a pair that seemed to search for a nesting place along the floating island.

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula* Linnaeus, 1758)

A few individuals occurred at Bajan Obo probably still passage migrants. Their data are as follows: 2 drakes on 15 June and a small flock of 7 (6 drakes and 1 duck) on 16 June.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser* Linnaeus, 1758)

This species prefers the higher altitudes. It was more numerous in Mandal region along the rivers and on the ice marshes. There was a maximum number of 14 birds in this area. They appeared mostly in single females, in smaller female groups or in pairs between 6-15 June at Mandal. Only one record at Bajan Obo: 1 male on 16 June.

Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to the other members of the expedition, namely Győző Buzetzky, Béla Kalocsa and Imre Karáth for their help in the fieldwork and especially the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for sponsoring the expedition.

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